

Daily Health Screening and Handling a Case of COVID-19 in City-Regulated Child Care: What Child Care Operators Need to Know

Child care program operators play an important role in helping New York City (NYC) slow the spread of COVID-19 by quickly addressing cases of COVID-19 in their programs. This guide provides answers to some questions about screening and how to handle confirmed or possible cases of COVID-19 in your child care program.

Please refer to [New York State COVID-19 child care program requirements](#) and the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene’s (NYC Health Department) Child Care [Reopening FAQ](#) and [Checklist](#) for additional information regarding physical distancing, face coverings, hygiene, cleaning and disinfection, and other topics.

Remember, it is critical that all New Yorkers get tested and follow the core four actions to prevent COVID-19:

- **Stay home if sick:** Stay home if you are sick, tested positive for COVID-19, have been in close contact with someone who has COVID-19 or recently traveled, unless you are leaving for essential medical care (including COVID-19 testing) or other essential errands.
- **Physical distancing:** Stay at least 6 feet away from others.
- **Wear a face covering:** Protect yourself and those around you. You can be contagious without symptoms and spread the disease when you cough, sneeze, talk or breathe. Face coverings help reduce the spread of COVID-19.
- **Practice healthy hand hygiene:** Wash your hands often with soap and water or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available; clean frequently touched surfaces regularly; avoid touching your face with unwashed hands; and cover your cough or sneeze with your arm, not your hands.

Contact your NYC Health Department Bureau of Child Care [Borough Office](#) with any questions or to report a suspected COVID-19 case.

Daily Screening

How can I reduce the risk of spreading COVID-19 in my child care program?

Program staff and children must be screened daily prior to entering the child care program. Review the NYC Health Department’s model health screening tool, which includes specific questions about COVID-19 symptoms, testing and exposures.

- Train staff and parents/guardians on how to use the health screening tool in the morning before leaving home and about how to notify program staff if they answer “yes” to any of the questions.
- Assure staff and families that medical information will be kept confidential.

- Call the parents/guardians of a child who is absent from child care to learn whether the child has COVID-19.
- Share with parents/guardians the [Child Care Program FAQ](#) and [COVID-19: What Parents and Guardians Need to Know FAQ](#) so they know what to expect given COVID-19 precautions.

How should I conduct daily health screenings?

Use the health screening tool in whichever way makes sense for your child care program. Ideas on how to implement daily health screenings include:

- Call staff and families before they leave home to ask the screening questions.
- Set up an automated phone line that allows staff and families to indicate “yes” or “no” to the screening questions, and have someone monitor the line to ensure compliance.
- Issue an auto-generated email or survey that enables a response.
- If screening from home is not feasible, designate a screening area and distribute the screening questions on paper to staff, parents/guardians and any other people who enter the child care program when they arrive. If written forms are used, they should not identify anyone by name.

What safety protocols are required if screening is conducted on-site at the child care program?

- Staff, children, parents, guardians and any other person seeking entry into the child care program must maintain at least 6 feet of distance from others while waiting to be screened.
- Screeners and people being screened (except for children under age 2) must wear a face covering if they can medically tolerate one. If a person being screened cannot medically tolerate one, the child care program should consider a reasonable accommodation, such as having the person complete a written screening survey rather than an in-person screening.
- Screen in a location that is not a confined space (for example, do not use a small office with a closed door). If possible, perform screenings outdoors.
- Design a way to screen that prevents others from hearing what is being said and to minimize others from observing screenings.
- Incorporate physical distancing (maintaining at least 6 feet between screeners and others) or physical barriers to minimize exposure between screener and people being screened while screenings are being performed.

Should we take temperatures as part of the daily health screening? What safety protocols are required?

Child care programs are not required to check temperatures. If you decide to conduct temperature checks:

- Use a noncontact thermometer (such as an infrared forehead thermometer or infrared scanner). Do not use oral (inserted into the mouth) or tympanic (inserted into the ear) thermometers.

- The person using the noncontact thermometer should strictly follow the manufacturer’s instructions for use. Additional guidance regarding use of non-contact infrared thermometers can be found [here](#). You can also visit [fda.gov](https://www.fda.gov) search for “noncontact thermometer” for more information.
- When noncontact thermometers are used and screeners do not have physical contact with the people being screened, gloves do not need to be changed before the next temperature check.
- Screening areas should have a supply of alcohol wipes to sanitize equipment that inadvertently touches someone. Clean after each person is screened if there is contact.

Interpreting Results and Exclusion of Staff and Children

How will I know if a staff member or child has received a positive COVID-19 diagnostic test?

The NYC Health Department will let you know when a person who has identified as being a staff member or attendee at your child care program has a positive diagnostic test for COVID-19. You may hear from the NYC Health Department even before your staff member or the child’s parents or guardians notify you. If you hear first from staff or families, contact your Bureau of Child Care [Borough Office](#) to report the case. The NYC Health Department will follow up to let you know whether the person is a confirmed case and, if they are, inform you on next steps for determining if others at the child care program should be considered close contacts who require exclusion and quarantine, as described below.

While the person is waiting for their test results, can they attend the child care program?

A person who has symptoms of COVID-19 (such as a fever of 100 degrees Fahrenheit [F] or higher, new cough, new loss of taste or smell, or shortness of breath that started within the last 10 days) or whose health care provider tested them for COVID-19 for another clinical reason within the last 10 days must stay home while they wait for their test results. If the person had been told to quarantine because they were identified as a close contact or recently traveled, they must stay home for the full 10 days, even if the test result is negative. See below for additional guidance based on test results.

When can a staff member or child in my program return to child care if they have a positive COVID-19 test or symptoms of COVID-19?

Any person with symptoms of COVID-19 (including a fever of 100 degrees F or higher, new cough, new loss of taste or smell, or shortness of breath within the past 10 days) or whose provider tested them for COVID-19 for another clinical reason cannot attend the child care program, even if their health care provider says that they have an different diagnosis (such as for allergies, strep throat or flu) until:

- It has been at least 10 days since the person’s symptoms started, they have not had a fever for the last 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medication and their overall illness has improved

- Or the person receives a negative COVID-19 diagnostic test and has been fever-free for 24 hours.
 - The exception to this is a person who has been told to quarantine because they were identified as a close contact (see below), as they must stay home for the full 10-day quarantine period even if the test result is negative.
 - The negative test must be from a saliva sample, or a nose or throat swab, and must be a molecular test. An antigen diagnostic test or blood antibody test is not acceptable for this purpose. People should ask their provider **before they get tested** to make sure they are getting the right type of test. When someone seeks to return to school after having had symptoms but before the end of their isolation period, they should verify their negative test result was from a molecular diagnostic test. For more information about testing, see [COVID-19 Testing: Frequently Asked Questions](#).
- Note that routine, non-COVID-19 guidance still applies for determining when a child or staff member may return to the child care program.

If someone in a child care classroom is confirmed to have COVID-19, when can staff members and children in that classroom return to child care?

If COVID-19 has been confirmed by a positive diagnostic test (a nose or throat swab or saliva sample), all close contacts of the person must quarantine and cannot attend school for 10 days after their last contact with the infectious person, even if the close contacts are tested and have a negative COVID-19 diagnostic test result sooner than 10 days.

- A close contact is any person who was within 6 feet for a total of 10 minutes over a 24-hour period; shared a classroom; or spent more than 10 minutes in an enclosed space similar in size to a typical classroom with a person who has COVID-19 while the person was potentially contagious, even if they use of a face coverings or other barriers.
- For a child care program this will likely mean, at a minimum, all children and the teacher in one classroom or home care setting.

What if someone in my child care program has had an antibody test?

A positive or negative antibody test result should not be used to make any decisions about whether someone can work or attend the child care program. Antibody tests for COVID-19 cannot be used to detect whether someone is currently sick or infected. It is also not yet known whether a positive antibody test means that someone is protected from getting COVID-19 again.

Notifying Families

If I learn that a staff member or child has a positive COVID-19 diagnostic test, what should I do?

- Contact your Bureau of Child Care [Borough Office](#).

- If you have not yet been in communication with the NYC Health Department, immediately call 866-692-3641 to report a confirmed case in your child care program. Please call only when a staff member or child has a positive result from a diagnostic test (not an antibody test) for COVID-19.
 - **Note:** If your program has a contract with the NYC Department of Education (NYC DOE), you must immediately notify the NYC DOE's Division of Early Childhood Education of any positive COVID-19 test results at your program, including in any noncontracted classrooms at the same location.
- All child care programs must cooperate with the NYC Health Department and [NYC Test & Trace Corps](#) to identify and exclude people with symptoms of COVID-19, people who test positive for COVID-19 and people who have been exposed to COVID-19.
- The NYC Health Department will determine the person's likely infectious period, which is the time period when they can spread the virus, to determine whether they attended your child care program during the infectious period.
 - If the NYC Health Department determines the person was **not** in your child care program during their infectious period, there is nothing else to do unless the NYC Health Department directs you otherwise.
 - If the NYC Health Department determines the person was in your child care program during their infectious period, they will work with you to identify everyone who could have been a close contact (see definition on page 4). This will include, at a minimum, all students and staff who were in the same classroom or similar type space for 10 minutes or more with a person who has COVID-19, regardless if face masks, face coverings or barriers were used.
 - Depending on your programming, there may be other close contacts. For example, if children or teachers move between groups, there may be close contacts in other classes or groups.
- The NYC Health Department will provide a template letter for you to notify all identified close contacts (staff members, and parents and guardians of children) to tell them they or their children were exposed to COVID-19 and need to quarantine for 10 days from the date they were last exposed, as well as what to do if they develop symptoms during this time. The letter will inform them there was an exposure but will not reveal the name or other identifying information of the person who has COVID-19 or any other identifying information.
 - Close contacts may not enter any child care facility during the quarantine period and should stay home except for essential medical care (including COVID-19 testing).
 - If staff or children identified as close contacts are already on-site, follow your existing isolation protocol, contact the children's parents and guardians for immediate pick-up, and send staff who are close contacts home.
- Report the information to your Bureau of Child Care [Borough Office](#) if they are not already aware.

What should I do if learn during nonbusiness hours that a staff member or child has COVID-19?

If a staff member, parent or guardian notifies you that they have COVID-19 or symptoms of COVID-19 during nonbusiness hours:

- Remind the staff member, parent or guardian they or their child cannot enter the child care program for at least 10 days and should isolate at home.
- Call the NYC Health Department at 866-692-3641 and be sure to provide contact information for someone to return your call outside of school or regular business hours. (**Note:** For calls at night or on weekends or holidays, NYC Health Department staff will usually return your call within 24 hours.) The NYC Health Department will investigate whether the person is a confirmed case of COVID-19 and will contact you. If the case is confirmed and the case attended the child care program during their infectious period, the NYC Health Department will work with you to identify close contacts who must be excluded.

I have reported a case to the NYC Health Department. What should I do next?

Most child care programs will receive a call back from a NYC Health Department case investigator within one to two days. During this time any students or staff in the classroom or other close contacts of the case should quarantine at home while they wait for further instructions. If the NYC Health Department's case investigators determine they are close contacts, they will hear directly from the NYC Test & Trace Corps with further instructions about quarantine. Remind staff and families to answer their phone during this period as contact tracers will be trying to reach them.

Should I provide a letter to staff, parents and guardians of children who were *not* close contacts?

You are strongly encouraged to inform people who were not close contacts that there was a person with COVID-19 at your child care program, without compromising the confidentiality of the confirmed case. The NYC Health Department will share a template letter for a child who was not exposed.

Can I share information about the person with COVID-19 with the families in my program?

No. You should not reveal the identity of the person with COVID-19 (other than to the NYC Health Department staff assisting in the investigation) or share information about the person with COVID-19, including the classroom the person attended or any information about the symptoms the person may have had. That information is confidential. Maintaining confidentiality will help encourage other people to disclose when they have COVID-19.

What should I do if a staff member or child with symptoms of COVID-19 was tested for COVID-19 by their provider for another clinical reason but is not a confirmed case? Should I notify families?

Only confirmed cases require assessment of close contacts and exclusions. You are not required to notify families when someone in the program has symptoms of COVID-19 but is not confirmed. If you want to notify families, let them know that:

- The person has symptoms, is not a confirmed case of COVID-19, and is not attending the child care program for at least 10 days (unless they receive a negative molecular diagnostic test result, as described above).
- Their child may continue to attend the child care program.
- If they are concerned, they should talk to their provider.
- The symptoms of COVID-19 are very nonspecific and are often similar to other respiratory viral infections, including the flu.

Where can I find information about COVID-19 testing to provide to my staff and families?

Provide your staff and families with information about [COVID-19 testing](#) and remind them to let you know as soon as they receive any positive results. Testing is free at many locations for all New Yorkers, regardless of immigration status.

Do I need to do any special cleaning or disinfection in the areas the person with COVID-19 used while in their infectious period?

Close off areas used by the person confirmed to have COVID-19 and follow the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's guidelines on [Cleaning and Disinfecting Your Facility](#).

The NYC Health Department may change recommendations as the situation evolves.

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